

Police discover similarities in prostitute deaths

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By Harry Harris
The Tribune

Five prostitutes who worked downtown and in West Oakland have been slain in the last three months but police are not fully convinced the same person is responsible.

"We could have one killer or we could have five killers," one investigator said yesterday.

Three of the victims were shot to death. Two were savagely beaten. Except that all the women had records of arrests for prostitution or sex-related offenses and worked the same areas there are not that many other similarities, investigators said.

"The similarities cannot be ignored, but it's a little premature at this point to say if they're connected," Capt. Jim Hahn said.

Added homicide Sgt. Robert Chenault: "There are similarities between them, but there are also numerous differences."

The five slayings are grim reminders that the world's oldest profession is among the most dangerous, but have not stopped prostitutes from trading sex for money.

Connie, who works 36th Street near the California Hotel, said most of the prostitutes "have to be out here — no matter what — to pay for their drugs. They're so doped up they can't stop."

'We could have one killer or we could have five killers.'

— A police investigator

Another prostitute, working near 29th and San Pablo, said she thinks many other street-walkers won't stop working "because they don't think it's gonna be them."

"It's not an issue of getting in the car or if they're going to die," said the woman, who asked that her name not be used. "They just think it just won't be them."

The woman said all prostitutes, including herself, are taking more precautions, like refusing "car dates" unless the customer is a regular.

"You can screen the man more carefully, of course, but how can you be sure? What can you do to fight against a gun?"

The most recent victim was Debra Lynn Adkins, 29, found bludgeoned to death Sunday morning at the entrance to Roberts Park on Skyline Boulevard in the Oakland hills.

See PROSTITUTE, Page D-2

Continued from Page D-1

Adkins, who lived in downtown Oakland, had been released from the Oakland City Jail about 11:45 p.m. Saturday after being arrested earlier in the day for public drunkenness, said Sgt. Dana Weaver of the East Bay Regional Park District Police, who is investigating her death.

According to Oakland Municipal Court records, Adkins has been arrested and charged in the past after being caught engaging in sex acts with men in their vehicles at different downtown locations.

Her sister, Deborah Stilwell, of Cloverdale, said learning about her sister's prostitution background was a shock to her.

"Whenever I saw her she was up and positive," Stilwell said.

Stilwell said her sister was given up for adoption by their mother at birth, but when her adopted mother died some 15 years ago "she came looking for us."

She said Adkins never turned down legitimate employment and had worked as a waitress and railroad steward.

The other four killings are being investigated by Oakland police, who have compared notes with EBRPD police. The victims are:

■ Teresa Ann Greenlee, 26, found slain Sept. 25 under a freeway overpass in the 3400 block of Louise Street in West Oakland. She had been shot in the head. She was last seen alive the night before, walking in the 2300 block of San Pablo Avenue.

■ Five days earlier, on Sept. 20, Annie Green, 29, was found shot to death just a few blocks away at 36th and Peralta streets,

also underneath a freeway overpass. Green who lived in West MacArthur Boulevard motels, was known to work the 3000 block of San Pablo Avenue. Besides arrests for prostitution, court records show arrests for drug offenses.

■ Kim Williams, 24, a shooting victim, was found partially nude about 7 a.m. Sept. 6 beside the steps at the rear entrance to Oakland's Rose Garden at Vernon Street and Monte Vista Avenue. Known to police and co-workers alike as Chocolate, she also lived in West MacArthur motels and was known to frequent San Pablo Avenue.

■ The other beating victim was Mary Sims, 29, whose nude body was found on the doorstep of a home in the 3200 block of Kansas Street in East Oakland July 31. Sims, who was also known as Mary Boccalini, Mary E. Crisp and Crystal Sims, had last been seen about 5 p.m. the previous day in the area of 19th and Castro streets, police said.

Investigators feel that all the victims were probably picked up by their killers and so far police have spent dozens of hours interviewing prostitutes and others hoping to find someone who may have witnessed the women getting into cars.